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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003799

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: AMAR AL-HAKIM: SUPPORT FOR SPD, MOVING AHEAD ON
FEDERALISM

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a November 16 meeting, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) heir apparent Amar al-Hakim told the Ambassador that ISCI strongly supports a Strategic Partnership Declaration (SPD) and that he would convey ISCI's support for a long-term bilateral partnership to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. The black-turbaned Amar also briefed on the recent formation of a council comprised of the governors of nine southern Shia-majority provinces, a possible first step toward achieving ISCI's stated objective of a southern region. Amar claimed that such diverse groups and individuals like the Sadrists, the Fadhila Party, ex-Baathists, and Sunni firebrand Harith al-Dhari were warming to the notion of federalism, though no consensus view had yet emerged. Amar was joined by CoR member and Badr supremo Hadi al-Amri who complained about CoR Speaker Mashadani's handling of the draft De-Baathification Law but noted that Mashadani now claims to support the bill, though it is opposed by the Sadrists. Both Hadi and Amar expressed concern over implementation details of Maliki's proposed general amnesty program, and Amar predicted that the stranglehold of Sadrist gangs over services in some areas would be broken by improved GOI institutions. Amar expressed lingering concern about Sadrist shenanigans within the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), commenting that problems within IHEC could complicate future elections. End Summary.

ISCI Supportive on SPD

12. (C) The Ambassador updated Amar on his discussions with Maliki over the text of a proposed declaration, emphasizing the importance we place on finalizing and issuing a joint statement in the coming week. He expressed appreciation for the supportive role ISCI and ISCI senior official (and GOI Vice President) Adel Abdel Mehdi had played in the SPD process to date and urged Amar and his father, ISCI Chairman Abdel Aziz, to use their considerable influence to encourage Maliki to move forward on the declaration and allay any Maliki concerns about negative domestic reaction to the agreement. Amar replied that ISCI thinks the SPD advances both Iraqi and American national interests, and has been discussing the issue with Iraqi leaders. Amar noted that VP Adel had spent a lot of time working on the declaration but that Maliki had assumed personal responsibility over the process because "Maliki thinks it is better that way." Amar said ISCI would continue to encourage Maliki to build a real long-term bilateral partnership and he would discuss any reservations Maliki might have about going forward with the declaration. The Ambassador stressed that the declaration would be an affirmation of Iraq's sovereignty, adding that it would be followed by a final UNSCR renewal, and urged ISCI's full support.

Emergence of De Facto ISCISTAN?

13. (C) An avowed advocate for the formation of a southern region comprising Iraq's Shia-majority provinces, Amar briefed on a November 7 meeting in Diwaniyah of the governors of nine southern provinces (Basrah Governor Waeli did not attend but sent a representative), many of whom are affiliated with ISCI/Badr. According to Amar, the governors decided to form a council that would meet periodically to discuss and tackle common problems. The council would be chaired on a one-month rotating basis among the nine governors, and the chairman would be tasked with representing the council in dealings with the central government, thus giving the nine provinces greater collective weight. Both Amar and Badr strongman Hadi al-Amri claimed that Iraqis were warming to the concept of federalism, and Amar cited a public opinion poll that showed public acceptance of federalism had jumped from 18 to 46 percent in the last few months. Amar said that even such diverse groups and individuals as the Sadrists, the Fadhila Party, ex-Baathists, and Sunni firebrand Harith al-Dhari were coming around on the notion of federalism, though no consensus view on the practical concept of federalism had yet emerged. Hadi al-Amri noted that Sunnis used to equate federalism with "godlessness," but are slowly beginning to see its virtues. Regarding Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi's position on federalism, Hadi stated that "his mind says yes but his heart says no."

Pending Legislation and Amnesty Proposal

14. (C) As head of the CoR Defense and Security Committee and a key drafter of the so-called "Leaders' Draft" of the De-Baathification Law (Law on Accountability and Justice), Hadi attributed much of the delay in bringing the bill to the

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CoR floor to the conduct of CoR Speaker Mashadani. He claimed Mashadani had tried to bring a competing draft of the De-Baath law to the floor, even after Hadi objected and pointed out the draft Mashadani favored had not been approved by the top GOI leaders or the CoR's Political Council. Mashadani later complicated the matter further when he declared in the presence of the Sadrist bloc that the USG preferred the "Leaders' Draft" in an attempt to whip up Sadrist opposition. Hadi said Mashadani told him recently that he now supports the "Leaders' Draft." He mentioned that he was unpleasantly surprised to learn that Radio al-Hurra was publicly urging the CoR to pass the bill. Hadi predicted the CoR would pass a draft Provincial Powers law, noting that the Sunni public and the Anbar Awakening are eager for provincial elections while the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party is not.

15. (C) Asked by the Ambassador about Maliki's reported proposal of a general amnesty, both Amar and Hadi expressed concern over implementation details. For example, Hadi claimed the Iraqi constitution allows the Prime Minister to grant only special amnesty in individual cases, and that only the CoR can approve general amnesty in the form of legislation, over which there currently is no consensus. He said he would support amnesty in all but those cases involving terror, narcotics trafficking, and other limited areas. Amar questioned whether general amnesty was an appropriate measure under the circumstances, repeating an anecdote he claimed to have heard from an unnamed American general that after an MNF-I release of 5000 detainees several years ago, MNF-I ended up re-arresting 18 percent for new offenses committed after their release.

Sadrist Mellowing?

16. (C) The Ambassador noted signs of improving relations between ISCI and its rival Shia movement, the Sadr Trend, and asked about Sadrism direction. Amar replied that Sadrism gangs have proven adept at controlling service and protection

rackets in some areas (he claimed to have heard stories that Sadrism protection gangs demand the equivalent of about USD 45 per month from each household in areas they control for "security" fees, and also operate numerous gas stations) but that their grip is being loosened and will eventually be broken as GOI security forces and institutions grow in strength and competence. He said he had heard that Moqtada al-Sadr ordered his followers to stop such rackets, thus stripping such activities of legitimacy. Amar stated that, overall, the Sadrists appear to be moderating their positions. He cited the appearance of Sadrism CoR member Baha al-Araji and the Ambassador at last week's Dhi Qar Forum, noting that a year ago a Sadrism would have never agreed to participate alongside a USG official in a public gathering.

Lingering Problems at Electoral Commission

17. (C) Recalling that Amar had previously expressed concern about Sadrism shenanigans within the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), the Ambassador asked about the current IHEC situation. Amar replied that IHEC is still beset with problems and that "when the person in charge has no integrity, the entire organization has no integrity." He said the UN had sent a letter of concern to the CoR about the IHEC, and that he had raised his concerns with President Talabani. Amar warned that if the UN does not supervise future provincial elections, the results of such elections would be called into question and the process could create conflict.

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